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SUBJECT: OUAGA IV MAY RESOLVE THE CRISIS, BUT AT A COST

REF: A) ABIDJAN 090 B) 08 ABIDJAN 879

Classified By: Ambassador Wanda Nesbitt for Reasons 1.4 (b/d)

11. (S/NF) Summary: Since the Ouaga IV accord was signed in late December 2008, Embassy has noted widely varying reports about what the accord means, both in terms of what it requires each side to do, and the broader political implications. This message gives our analysis of Ouaga IV. We believe the agreement is significant in that it commits the Forces Nouvelles (FAFN) to disarm before elections -- a reversal of the position the FAFN has taken in every agreement up until now -- and to turn over administrative authority, including control of all financial resources, to the Gbagbo government almost immediately. In this regard, Ouaga IV holds out the prospect of a fairly rapid reunification of the country and dismantling of the rebellion. Getting there will require the FAFN to give up perks they've enjoyed until now, which could prove to be difficult. We believe the political significance of Ouaga IV is that it reflects the distance that has developed between Prime Minister Soro and some of his zone commanders, who represent an obstacle to the PM achieving his political goals. In the short term, Soro and Pres. Gbagbo may now have a shared interest in speeding the departure of the comzones: the PM because he is rapidly losing control over them; the president, because the comzones represent his government's failure to prevail against the north. We anticipate that at least a few of the comzones will refuse to comply with the provisions of Ouaga IV and that PM Soro will call on loyal FAFN elements to remove the recalcitrant comzones. We also anticipate that Soro will have the support of President Gbagbo and the FDS (national defense forces), as well as President Compaore, if he ultimately determines that he must use force to implement Ouaga IV. End Summary.

CONFUSION ABOUT WHAT DISARMAMENT BEFORE THE ELECTION MEANS

12. (SBU) When SRSRG Choi briefed diplomats on January 8 on the terms of the fourth supplementary agreement to the OPA, he highlighted the fact that Ouaga IV reverses the sequencing of disarmament, requiring it to be completed two months before the election, rather than after the election as anticipated in Ouaga III and previous agreements. Gen. Amoussou, the senior UNOCI military officer, asserted that disarmament in the context of Ouaga IV means the full DDR package, i.e., that any payments owed to the FAFN or militias have to be carried out, in addition to weapons being collected. Several Ambassadors (including me) noted that this provision could make holding an election in 2009 extremely difficult, given that funding for the DDR process has not been identified.

13. (C) In a January 14 meeting, Ambassador raised the disarmament issue with Prime Minister Soro, who asserted without hesitation that for the purposes of Ouaga IV, disarmament means "regroupment", i.e., that the 5,000 FAFN elements destined for the new army must be identified and grouped into 4 designated camps. Their weapons must be surrendered but will be kept under lock and key, and be under

the supervision of the impartial forces. Soro was quite clear about the payment of demobilized soldiers not being a quid pro quo for the election. In fact, he said, "the next administration" may finish paying them. Regarding the civic service and the PNRRC, Soro confirmed that payments called for in the Ouaga IV accord are not in addition to, but instead of government organized vocational training.

¶4. (S) As noted in Ref A, FAFN leaders in Bouake were uncertain of what Ouaga IV requires, and Korhogo comzone Fofie was clearly under the impression that the troops would be receiving training and money. Despite confirmation from both PM Soro and Amb. Badini (the Facilitator's representative in Abidjan) that the comzones concurred with Ouaga IV before it was signed, there is obviously confusion about the details and the implementation of this most recent agreement. In a conversation on February 2, Badini reminded Ambassador that Soro was in Paris when the final text of Ouaga IV was agreed to and therefore was not in the room for a number of important conversations. There is an important detail as it appears that PM was relying on the judgement of Pres. Compaore and accepted the text of the agreement based on Compaore's recommendation. It is worth noting that PM Soro scheduled a 10 day working visit to Bouake at the end of January, reportedly to sort out with the comzones how Ouaga IV is to be implemented. (According to the press, Soro had to leave Bouake to attend a ceremony in Togo marking the death of Pres. Eyadema.)

UNCERTAINTY ABOUT WHY THE FAFN AGREED TO IT

¶5. (S/NF) The question that has puzzled many observers here is why the Forces Nouvelles reversed their position on disarming after the election. At first glance, Ouaga IV certainly appears to be a victory for the presidential camp. Citing the case of the DRC, the FPI has long argued that elections could not be held before disarmament because the climate would be inhospitable. In fact, Simone Gbagbo caused a major stir last year when she called for disarmament before the election during a trip to the north. The FAFN has consistently argued that the presidential camp could not be trusted to keep its word regarding identification or elections, and that the presence of an armed force in the north was necessary to keep the pressure on. Most diplomats agree in principle with the Gbagbo camp, but virtually all agree with the FAFN evaluation of Gbagbo's trustworthiness. Our assessment at this point is that several factors may have made disarmament before the elections look more attractive to Soro and the Forces Nouvelles than in the past:

a) PM Soro is losing whatever control he had over the Forces Nouvelles and undoubtedly has a personal interest in curbing, if not eliminating, the power of the comzones.

b) The identification process in the north was in danger. Following postponement of the election last November, the FPI began a full-fledged campaign to discredit the identification process, particularly in the north. They argued that massive fraud was being perpetrated and that a credible process could not be carried out without civilian authorities present. FPI members began calling for a complete halt of the identification process in the north. In addition, CEI (Independent Electoral Commission) president, Robert Mambe, floated late last year the idea of allowing documents other than a birth certificate to be used for the ID process. Reopening the question of what documents are acceptable could set the process back several years. The prospect of having the identification process shut down, after having fought (in theory) to reach this point, may have alarmed the FAFN enough to induce them to compromise.

c) In addition to mistrust of Pres. Gbagbo, some observers say the FAFN was reluctant to disarm before the election due to fears that Gbagbo would send the FDS to attack them. There is speculation that the Facilitator may have secured a commitment from Gbagbo not to do so in return for assurances that he (Compaore) would not restrain the comzones who choose

to move to Burkina, from launching a new rebellion. We find this plausible. Compaore's role has consistently been a topic of great debate although observers in Abidjan have always assumed that the Burkinabe president retained a high degree of influence with the Forces Nouvelles.

RETURN TO A SINGLE TAX COLLECTION SYSTEM COULD TRIGGER CLASHES

¶6. (C) The Forces Nouvelles agreed in principle in the Ouaga III accord to allow the return of government customs agents and the re-establishment of a single tax and customs collection operation (unicite de caisse is the local term). They did not follow through on this commitment, however, ostensibly because the presidential camp was not meeting its commitments with regard to resolving the grades/ranks issues. The reunification of the treasury as called for in Ouaga IV is therefore not new, but its implementation will still be a key barometer. As noted in Ref A, elements of the Forces Nouvelles say they are concerned that government officials could alienate the local population if they return with an aggressive tax/customs collection mandate. To reduce the likelihood of problems, the FAFN have insisted that a sensitization program be carried out to inform local populations of changes on the horizon. Some government officials fear this is a ruse to postpone turning over control of resources. Embassy's view is this may be a more difficult issue for the FAFN to resolve internally than the disarmament one.

¶7. (S/NF) Moussa Dosso, the Forces Nouvelles' Finance Minister told Ambassador in December (see ref B) that he and Finance Minister Diby Koffi had already agreed upon a scheme whereby the government and the Forces Nouvelles would implement a single tax/customs collection system and would share the revenue. We wonder now, what provision, if any, was made for comzones. Reports that the comzones are not happy with Ouaga IV, particularly their own financial settlements, suggest that their needs/interests were not taken into account. Rumors have long been in circulation about how much the comzones have enriched themselves, with the implication being that all will be able to retire comfortably. Whether true or not, we are skeptical that all of the comzones will simply walk away from the substantial resources they control. Should any resist, we can readily envision clashes of the kind that took place in Seguela and Vavoua last year when PM Soro decided to relieve comzone Zakaria Kone of command. Ouaga IV may represent an implicit acknowledgment on the part of all the signatories that resolving the crisis may require the sacrifice of some individuals.

¶8. (S/NF) Given the limited information available to us about the current views of the comzones, it is difficult to determine the extent to which their reported unhappiness with Ouaga IV represents a desire to hang on to lucrative positions of power, or sincere discomfort with the terms of the agreement. Certain comzones have always been skeptical of PM Soro's rapprochement with Pres. Gbagbo and continue to suspect that Soro has 'sold out' the FAFN in order to preserve his own political future. Proponents of this view see Ouaga IV as proof that Soro has betrayed the FAFN by agreeing to disarm before elections and will now move to eliminate the comzones who do not share his philosophy. Whether or not his viewpoint is accurate, it suggests that concerns about continued clashes among opposing factions of the FAFN are valid.

¶9. (C) In conclusion, Ouaga IV holds out the prospect that the country will in fact be reunified by the return of government authorities throughout the country and the withdrawal of the Forces Nouvelles. Gbagbo, Soro, and Compaore appear to have agreed that the time has come to end the stalemate and move forward. As long as the government permits the identification process to move forward without major disruption, we believe that PM Soro will do his utmost to enforce the reestablishment of a single tax/customs collections system and compel the regroupment of the Forces Nouvelles. Should he run into opposition, we would expect him

to use force to bring his own troops in line. And we would expect both Gnagbo and Compaore to defend this decision. the potential for isolated clashes over the next few months is real -- but they may be the price of peace.

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